

Need to greatly expand readers involved in 'Militant' drive

BY LOUIS MARTIN

The nine-week international campaign to win 3,500 more subscribers fell behind schedule this week, posing a challenge that can only be met by accelerating the involvement of more and more *Militant* readers in the effort.

From what we know, more than 77 readers have joined the circulation drive who have never before been part

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Fall 'Militant' subscription campaign					3,500
Country	quota	sold	%		
UNITED STATES					Should be 1357
Claysville, PA†*	10	8	80%		
Longview, WA†	8	6	75%		
Prisoners†*	10	7	70%		
Yakima, WA†*	15	9	60%		
Seattle	210	110	52%		
Redding, CA†*	10	5	50%		
Washington	110	52	47%		
Twin Cities	175	80	46%		
Des Moines	180	77	43%		
New York	450	192	43%		
Houston	150	62	41%		
Greensboro†	5	2	40%		
New Orleans†	5	2	40%		
Chicago	230	90	39%		
Miami	120	46	38%		
Los Angeles	200	74	37%		
Boston	110	39	35%		
Omaha, NE†	80	28	35%		
Lincoln, NE	35	11	31%		
Philadelphia	150	40	27%		
San Francisco	225	60	27%		
Atlanta	185	48	26%		
Tampa†	15	2	13%		
Rio Grande V TX†	25	3	12%		
Albuquerque, NM†	3	0	0%		
Muscoda, WI†	5	0	0%		
Total U.S.	2721	1053	39%		
UNITED KINGDOM					
Manchester	80	45	56%		
London	200	100	50%		
UK Total	280	145	52%		
CANADA	140	67	48%		
NEW ZEALAND	130	52	40%		
AUSTRALIA	90	40	44%		
Total	3361	1357	39%		
Should be	3500	1556	44%		
† New to scoreboard *Raised goal					

Workers stand on dignity in Hurricane Sandy wake

Protests demand restoration of power, gov't aid



Demonstrators rally Nov. 10 to demand Long Island Power Authority restore power.

BY EMMA JOHNSON AND DAN FEIN

NEW YORK—More than two weeks after Hurricane Sandy decimated neighborhoods across the Eastern Seaboard, working people confront callous indifference of government of-

GOVERNMENT RELIEF NOW!
FIGHT FOR JOBS PROGRAM!
—See editorial, p. 11

officials and the profit priorities of capitalist corporations, from foot-dragging utilities to insurance companies maneuvering to limit their liability.

More than 8 million houses and businesses in seven states lost electricity. As of Nov. 13, about 80,000 households were still without electricity in

Socialist candidates and supporters campaign, petition for ballot in LA

BY JAMES HARRIS

LOS ANGELES—Spirits were high as supporters of the Socialist Workers Party campaign here completed three days of campaigning and petitioning over the Nov. 11-12 weekend. The SWP is running Norton Sandler for mayor of Los Angeles and Eleanor García for a seat on the Unified School Board in District 2.

Campaigners are organizing to collect at least 1,000 signatures from registered voters for both Sandler and García, twice the legal requirement to get on the ballot. Some 1,070 signatures were collected for Sandler and 735 for García in the first three days of the effort.

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New York and New Jersey. According to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, 2,700 in New York City are still staying in shelters.

Continued on page 11

South Africa: Farmworkers strike, inspired by ongoing fights of miners



Farmworkers in De Doorns, South Africa, march Nov. 12 demanding wages be doubled.

BY SETH GALINSKY

More than 12,000 farmworkers, inspired by a wave of mine strikes, have gone on strike demanding higher wages and better working conditions. Meanwhile, some 26,000 platinum miners on strike since Sept. 12 in South Africa are refusing to accept demands by Anglo American Platinum Limited (Amplats) that they return to work in exchange for a one-time bonus and a promise to negotiate wages in the future.

A walkout in the Western Cape that began at the beginning of November

Continued on page 8

Gay rights referenda votes register gain for working class

BY JOHN STUDER

One of the important results in the 2012 elections was the victory in four states—Maryland, Maine, Washington and Minnesota—of ballot measures that overturned discriminatory marriage laws based on prejudice against individual's gender or sexual orientation.

COMMENTARY

These results reflect changing attitudes within the working class, striking a blow to a form of prejudice and strengthening workers' unity and capacity to be the standard bearers in the fight against all forms of discrimination.

Before this year's election, similar discriminatory laws barring gay marriage had been passed in state refer-

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Workers fight 15-month lockout by American Crystal	8

London march protests deaths in police custody

BY HUGO WILS

LONDON—Some 400 people protesting deaths in police custody marched here from Trafalgar Square to Downing Street Oct. 27. This was the 14th annual demonstration organized by the United Families and Friends Campaign.

The group includes relatives and friends of those who died in custody of cops or officers in prisons or psychiatric hospitals. The march included family members of those killed in at least 18 cases.

Demonstrators carried a coffin whose surface was covered with names of those who died at the hands of cops. At 10 Downing Street, the official residence of British Prime Minister David Cameron, they delivered a letter demanding full disclosure of information withheld from victim’s families and unrestricted access to legal aid, which is currently means-tested.

“We are here to demonstrate to the government that we are not going away. As long as you have police officers killing our loved ones, we will be in your face until it stops,” Rupert Sylvester told the *Militant*. His son, Roger Sylvester, died in January 1999 after being restrained by officers in a padded room at a psychiatric hospital.

“The government is protecting the police officers responsible for the deaths of our relatives. The police should be working on our behalf—they are not the law, but they get away with murder year after year,” said Janet Alder, sister of Christopher Alder, a former black soldier who died April 1, 1998, after being left handcuffed and unconscious on the floor of a police station with offi-

cers standing by and reportedly making monkey noises.

Dawn Spiller, mother of Billy Spiller, who died in Aylesbury prison last year and suffered from autism, said authorities should “stop putting people with health problems in prisons.”

According to Inquest, an organization that its website says gathers information “on contentious deaths and their investigation,” 1,439 people died following contact with the police in England and Wales since 1990. Since 1969 no cop has been convicted for deaths in custody.

Meanwhile, a September report by an independent panel investigating what the media here call the “Hillsborough disaster” found that it was caused by a “failure in police control.”

On April 15, 1989, cops herded football supporters from Liverpool into an overcrowded stand at the Hillsborough stadium in Sheffield, England, crushing 96 of them to death against the fences.



Militant/Jonathan Silberman

Families and supporters of those who died while in custody of police march in London Oct. 27.

Police tampered with the evidence, amending 164 police statements and removing 116 negative comments about their conduct. Prime Minister Cameron was forced to apologize in parliament for the government’s and cops’ coverup. Sheila Coleman of the Hillsborough

Justice Campaign told BBC Radio 4 that criminal charges should be brought “because all the evidence today shows that South Yorkshire police ... lied and operated a coverup.”

Paul Davies contributed to this article.

US, Israel conduct largest joint military exercise

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

The largest ever joint military exercise between Washington and Tel Aviv began the last week of October as part of increased military and “intelligence” cooperation between the two governments.

The exercise, called Austere Challenge 2012, involves more than 1,000 U.S. troops stationed throughout Israel alongside a similar number of Israeli troops. An additional 2,500 U.S. forces based in Europe and the Mediterranean are also participating

in the drill. It’s scheduled to last about three weeks.

According to the United States European Command, “Patriot air defense batteries, an Aegis ballistic missile defense ship and related air defense systems will be deployed and integrated with Israeli equipment as part of an overall air defense network,” reported the *New York Times*.

As these exercises were getting under way, government officials in Sudan said four Israeli planes Oct. 24 bombed the Yarmouk industrial complex south of Khartoum, the country’s capital, setting the plant ablaze and killing two people. The area, which includes a factory where conventional weapons are reportedly produced, is in a “heavily populated low-income neighborhood,” reported the Associated Press.

“It was a double whammy, the explosion at the factory and then the ammunition flying into the neighborhood,” Abdal Ghadir Mohammed, 31, told AP. “The ground shook. Some homes were badly damaged.”

When asked about the attack by Israel’s Channel Two News, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak responded that “there is nothing I can say about this subject.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has backed away from immediate threats to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities.

Netanyahu’s earlier stance was opposed by many high ranking Israeli military officers, the majority of his cabinet, as well as the Obama administration. As incentive to shift away from the bombing threats, the White House responded by “upgrading American security assistance to Israel,” reported the *Times*, “so much so that earlier this year Mr. Barak described the level of support as greater than ever in Israel’s history.”

Meanwhile, Iranian fighter jets fired at a U.S. surveillance drone over the Persian Gulf Nov. 1, the Pentagon disclosed Nov. 8, after the incident was reported in the press. Iran’s defense minister, Brig. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, said the drone had entered Iranian airspace.

THE MILITANT

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Courtesy RWDSU
Workers at Astoria Car Wash in Queens, N.Y. after winning union representation.

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Submissions to the *Militant* may be published in the newspaper in print and digital format. By submitting, authors represent that their submissions are original and consent to publication in this manner.

Signed articles by contributors do not necessarily represent the *Militant*’s views. These are expressed in editorials.

Subscription campaign

Continued from front page
of distributing the paper.
Some have introduced the *Militant* to friends, relatives or coworkers, while others have joined the door-to-door outreach that is the backbone of the campaign. Roughly half of the subscriptions have been sold going door to door in working-class neighborhoods, according to reports from distributors.

Since last week, supporters of the paper in Boston, Chicago and New York have adopted goals of 110, 230 and 450 respectively. Long-term readers in Albuquerque, N.M., and Muscoda, Wis., have decided to join the chart with goals of three and five respectively. Readers from Claysville, Pa.; Redding, Calif.; and Yakima, Wash., have increased their goals.

After receiving four new subscriptions from inmates in Illinois and California this past week, the “prisoners” goal on the chart has been increased from five to 10, encouraging workers behind bars to be among the expanding number of readers and distributors of the paper.

The *Militant* Prisoners’ Fund makes it possible for readers behind bars to order subscriptions at a reduced rate of \$6 for six months. Half-year subscriptions are also offered free of charge for those who have no means to pay.

The cumulative local quotas now total 3,361—getting closer to the international goal.

“I want people to experience what I experienced to open their eyes and see

the bigger changes,” Charlie Brown said after joining a Nov. 10 protest of some 100 in North Chicago, Ill., marking the first anniversary of the cop killing of Darrin Hanna. Brown then went door to door in the area with other *Militant* readers. Hanna, 45, died after being beaten and repeatedly fired upon with Tasers by six North Chicago cops.

Brown works at Electro-Motive Diesel in Chicago. He recently renewed his *Militant* subscription and bought all four books on revolutionary working-class politics offered at reduced prices with a subscription. (See ad on this page.)

“I know people on the westside of Chicago who will be interested in the paper and books,” Brown said as he invited others to join him in his neighborhood next weekend. “There are people in Indiana and Florida I can call and point them to this.”

“By Peabody putting their mines into Patriot Coal and then filing for bankruptcy, we’re all in danger of losing our pensions and everything we fought for,” Linda Carter from Francisco, Ind., told *Militant* readers from Chicago and Bloomington, Ind. They were going door to door in the coalfield areas of southern Indiana last weekend and a worker who had bought a subscription for herself directed them to Carter’s house.

Carter is a retired coal miner who worked at Old Ben, a mine organized by the United Mine Workers of America near Francisco. She was part of struggles for the right of women to



Militant/Betsy Farley
Former coal miner Alyson Kennedy, left, and retired coal miner Linda Carter talk in Carter’s house Nov. 11 in Francisco, Ind., about *Militant* and fight against Patriot Coal’s attempt to scrap miners’ pensions and benefits through bankruptcy proceedings.

work in the mines and for equal treatment on the job.

Still active in the union, Carter has joined the fight to prevent Peabody Energy from dumping the pensions and benefits of more than 10,000 retirees and 10,000 family members through bankruptcy court proceedings by Patriot Coal, a spinoff created in 2007. She bought a subscription.

The *Militant* was also well received in another coal mining area of the world.

“A trip to Singleton, a mining town three and a half hours from Sydney in the Hunter Valley, was the high point of the subscription campaign here two weeks ago,” wrote Joanne Kuniansky from Sydney, Australia.

“We sold four subscriptions and eight single copies going door to door, meeting miners and workers in mining-related industries,” she said. “There was interest in the miners’ strikes in South Africa. We also confirmed that the downturn in coal mining has hit Australia, with workers reporting hundreds of layoffs.”

Two weekends ago, readers from Des Moines, Iowa; Lincoln and Omaha, Neb.; and Minneapolis joined forces in the Twin Cities area, selling 14 subscriptions. Tom Fiske from Minneapolis described how he teamed up with Fredy Huinil from Omaha.

“Fredy and I sold at an apartment complex in Richfield, a working-class suburb south of Minneapolis. A large portion of the residents work in construction, hotels and restaurants. Many were interested in hearing and discussing the possibility and necessity for a revolutionary struggle by millions of working people to take political power in the U.S.,” Fiske wrote.

“We sold six subscriptions and two copies of *The Cuban Five*, one of the books offered at reduced prices.”

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\$3 with subscription (usually \$5)

See distributors
on page 7

Support work of revolutionary party by contributing to SWP fund drive

BY SUSAN LAMONT

The chart for the second week of the fall Socialist Workers Party fund includes \$9,608 in contributions from eight areas. The funds have come from longtime *Militant* readers, including members and supporters of the Socialist Workers Party, people who attend *Militant* Labor Forums, a still small but growing number of first-time contributors, and other workers and young people.

Fund supporters in New York won two first-time contributors last week. A *Militant* sales team went door to door in East Elmhurst, Queens, Nov. 11, and met a limousine driver and a building contractor who both signed up for introductory subscriptions to the *Militant* and then each gave another \$5 to the Party-Building Fund. “All we had to do was tell them a little bit about the fund and ask for their help,” said Róger Calero, who organizes the *Militant* subscription effort in the city.

The annual fund began Oct. 20 and will end Dec. 23. At this point, the drive is substantially behind schedule—let’s close the gap! It is important for every participating area to get on the scoreboard and begin sending in contributions on a weekly basis, to avoid a last minute crunch to make the goal.

Contributions can be sent to the SWP address nearest you (see page 7) or directly to the SWP National Office at 306 W. 37th St., 10th floor, NY, NY 10018.

Susan LaMont is director of the 2012 SWP Party-Building Fund.

Party-Building Fund Week 2 of 9			
Area	Quota	Collected	%
Des Moines	\$2,250	\$653	29%
San Francisco	\$13,500	\$2,765	20%
Chicago	\$9,500	\$1,380	15%
Seattle	\$8,500	\$1,200	14%
Atlanta	\$8,600	\$1,075	13%
New York	\$20,000	\$1,785	9%
Los Angeles	\$8,500	\$700	8%
Miami	\$3,000	\$50	2%
Boston	\$4,000		0%
Houston	\$3,500		0%
Lincoln	\$250		0%
Omaha	\$600		0%
Philadelphia	\$4,200		0%
Twin Cities	\$6,000		0%
Washington	\$7,500		0%
Other			
Total	\$99,900	\$9,608	10%
Should Be	\$100,000	\$22,222	22%
* Raised goal			

LA SWP campaign

Continued from front page

On Saturday evening, after the first day's effort, petitioners came to the campaign headquarters to share their experiences over a Mexican dinner and to hear from the candidates.

"We tell working people not to depend on any politician or proposition but to depend on ourselves and our own strength as workers," García told the 32 participants. "We join other workers to campaign for a massive government-financed public works program to create jobs so that millions can be put to work providing the things that workers need."

For some this was the first time that they had petitioned for a socialist candidate.

"I was inspired by the spirit of the other petitioners and how well organized it was," Kevin Cole said, adding he had only planned to participate for half a day on Saturday but ended up putting in two full days. "We talked to people about reality. This is what working people need."

Maileen Au Young explained how she worked at making herself understood by everyone despite language differences. She used the different languages printed on the back of the petitions to walk potential signers through what they were signing and why.

Jorge Rios, a 28-year-old unemployed worker, said that he had petitioned before for a group that organized donations to various charities. "This [time] was easier for me," he said. "This is something I believe in. We give people solutions to the problems we confront. When they ask how do we get there I can talk about the Cuban Revolution, its example, what they did and how they did it."

Santos Ramos, a 28-year-old construction worker and one of the top petitioners, said he was impressed by the close attention working people paid to what he was saying. "When I explained that Norton Sandler is a worker who is trying to build a revolutionary working-class movement and that nothing else can make change for the working class, people stopped to listen and some signed the petition," he said.

Many described talking to workers who were interested in the politics of the campaign, but could not sign because of

undemocratic regulations that strip voting rights from those with felony convictions. A number bought a single copy of the *Militant* newspaper or a subscription.

"What we are seeing is the cumulative effects of life under the dictatorship of capital, where cops' stop-and-frisk operations, plea bargains and 'three-strikes' laws are used against the working class," Sandler told the meeting. "Only when the working class takes power out of the hands of the ruling rich can we put an end to these practices."

James Harris was the SWP presidential candidate in 2012.



Norton Sandler, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Los Angeles, petitions in Baldwin Hills Mall Nov. 10. Campaign supporters collected hundreds of signatures on petitions to put Sandler and Eleanor García, the party's candidate for Unified School Board in District 2, on the ballot.

Referenda votes on gay rights register gains

Continued from front page

enda the 30 times they had been on the ballot.

Even the bitterest opponents of equal protection under the law for gays admit the breadth of the change reflected in the vote on the four ballot measures.

"We should understand that this was not an argument we were going to win," Rod Dreher wrote in the *American Conservative* Nov. 8, "given how most people today, especially younger Americans, think about marriage and sexuality."

These changing attitudes are partially rooted in the social questions that were posed by the AIDS epidemic in the U.S., which began in the 1980s. As the disease spread over the next decade, hundreds of thousands were affected, particularly gay men, intravenous drug users and hemophiliacs.

As thousands fell ill, gay men and women faced discriminatory laws imposing restrictions on marriage that prevented many from using their companion's health care plans or barred involvement of companions in their partner's treatment. They had to stand aside if their companion's hostile families took over.

Growing protests by gay rights groups and others helped push these issues to national attention.

The disease spread in the African-American community. Between 2000 and 2003, more than half the HIV/AIDS cases reported to the national Centers for Disease Control involved Blacks.

Millions of workers across the country were increasingly appalled at the conditions forced on victims of AIDS by anti-gay bigotry and the denial of basic rights, including from discriminatory marriage laws.

As the public debate has sharpened, especially around repeated campaigns on ballot measures over the past few years, workers support for ending anti-gay discrimination has grown.

In Washington, the statewide and Seattle AFL-CIO, Service Employees International Union, International Association of Machinists, Washington Education Association, and Joint Council of Teamsters for Washington, Alaska and N. Idaho, as

well as numerous union locals, backed overturning the state's discriminatory law.

"Civil marriage is a civil right," Benjamin Jealous, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, told a May 2012 press conference. "We will oppose threats to the 14th Amendment guarantees of equal rights under the law in any state where this issue is raised."

Among African-Americans, support for equal protection for gays in marriage laws stands at 59 percent, up from 41 percent just a few months ago, ABC News reported.

While many opponents of equal rights concede they have lost the battle to keep discriminatory laws on the books, they now raise a specious campaign around "religious liberty" to minimize their losses.

This fight is important for the political rights of the working class as well.

"SSM is a clear threat to religious liberty," claims Rod Dreher in his article "SSM [single-sex marriage], Social Conservatives, & the Future."

"It is virtually impossible to argue about this with SSM backers, because they insist religious liberty begins and ends with preachers being able to voice opposition to homosexual-

ity, and having the right to refuse to marry gay couples in their houses of worship," the article states.

The Maryland, Maine and Washington referenda contained provisions that defended the right of churches to decline to conduct marriage ceremonies they consider counter to their religious beliefs.

Then Dreher got to the point: "The truth of all this will be made apparent to everyone when SSM becomes constitutionalized and religious organizations and religiously devout employers are compelled to offer benefits to their gay employees and their spouses, or face government sanction, including loss of tax-exempt status."

It is in the interest of the working class to fiercely defend the right of every individual to worship as they decide, free from government interference. But this has nothing to do with religious institutions having a "right" to deny social benefits—like health care or jobs—based on their ideological opinions.

This is the same issue posed today over the question of whether church-owned hospitals, schools and other businesses, as well as private companies whose bosses want to impose their religious views on their workers, have a "constitutional right" to deny contraceptive care to their employees.

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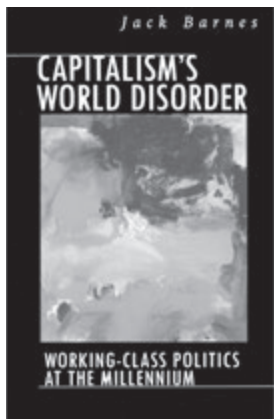
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Thousands strike Hostess across United States

Thousands of members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union walked off the job Nov. 9 against a concession contract unilaterally implemented by Hostess Brands. Twenty-three plants across the country are closed down, either by striking workers at plants where the cuts are being imposed now or by those honoring picket lines.

Hostess is one of the largest baking companies in the U.S., with some 18,500 workers in 36 bakeries, 570 retail outlets and 565 distribution centers.

In January the company entered its second bankruptcy proceeding in the last eight years.

The previous bankruptcy, which lasted from 2004 to 2009, led to the closure of 21 Hostess plants and union concessions. The reorganized company is owned by Ripplewood Holdings, a private equity firm, and two hedge funds—Silver Point Capital and Monarch Alternative Capital.

In September the company presented a “best and final offer” to workers—some 7,500 represented by the Teamsters Union and 5,700 by the BCTGM. Demands included an 8 percent wage cut, shifting 20 percent more of health care costs onto the workers, closure of more plants and elimination of the eight-hour day.

The Teamsters passed the concessions with 54 percent in favor, while BCTGM members rejected them by 92 percent. Hostess went to the bankruptcy judge and got the cuts imposed on the bakery union’s members, leading to the strikes.

Hostess CEO Gregory Rayburn announced Nov. 13 that the company is permanently closing at least three of the plants on strike: in Seattle, St. Louis and Cincinnati. “We will close the entire company if widespread strikes cripple our business,” he threatened.

—John Studer

Greek workers march against gov’t austerity

ATHENS, Greece—After two days of strikes across the country culminating in a Nov. 7 march of 100,000 here, the Greek parliament approved the latest package of austerity measures aimed at reducing government spending by \$23 billion over the next four years. Large contingents of transport, utility, hospital and municipal workers joined the march.

The measures passed by 153 to 128 with 19 abstentions. They were demanded by the so-called troika—the European Central Bank, European Commission and International Monetary Fund—as a prerequisite for \$40 billion in further loans to stave off government debt default.

The package includes raising the retirement age from 65 to 67 for those retiring in 2013 or later, cutting unemployment benefits, reducing pensions by 5 to 15 percent and eliminating all holiday bonuses.

The new law makes it easier to fire workers and reduces severance payments by as much as 83 percent. It allows lengthening the workweek to six days without overtime pay.

Official unemployment in August is more than 25 percent; among youth under 24 years old it is 58 percent. Since 2009 the country’s gross domestic product has dropped by 25 percent.

“Now we will have to challenge implementation of the austerity cuts plant by plant,” Panagiotis Katsaros, who works at the Eliniki Halivourgia steel mill, told the *Militant*. Workers at the mill went back to work in July after a nine-month strike against firings and cuts in working hours.

“We continue our difficult struggle for 126 of our coworkers to be rehired,” Katsaros said. “And the dairy processing plant Mevgal just went out on strike today because workers have not been paid in two months. Steelworkers will do what we can to help.”

—Natasha Terlexis

Quebec strikers at adhesive plant: ‘question of respect’

LAVAL, Quebec—“It’s a question of respect,” Serge Bellefeuille told the *Militant* in the picket trailer of the Union of Workers in Ceramics and Other Products (SSPCA) Oct. 29. The union has been on strike at MAPEI’s adhesives manufacturing plant here for nearly six months.

The workers, whose contract expired Dec. 13, 2011, walked out May 4. On Oct. 19, 84 union members out of a workforce of 115 rejected the boss’s “final offer” by 84 percent.



Militant/Georges Mehrabian

Workers march in Athens, Greece, Nov. 7 against latest round of government austerity cuts. Official unemployment in country, hit hard by capitalist economic crisis, stands at 25 percent.

The offer contained wage increases. But it also included management rights to transfer workers without respect for seniority for weeks at a time, and eliminated training for workers applying for transfer to a new position, Céline Lamarre, union business agent, told the *Militant*.

“We need flexibility in the plant, for production,” Lysanne Bruneau, human resources director for MAPEI in Canada, said in a Nov. 9 phone interview. “The union absolutely doesn’t want to give it to us.”

Strikers bolstered Montreal hotel workers’ picket lines in front of the Maritime Hotel Oct. 30, where 60 members of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) were locked out in late August.

—Katy LeRougetel and John Steele

Quebec hotel workers fight for wage raises, against layoffs

SAINT-HYACINTHE, Quebec—The 180 workers at Hôtel des Seigneurs, owned by SilverBirch, voted 85 percent in favor of going on strike Oct. 28 for improved wages and more hiring.

About 100 workers walked the picket line every day the first week.

They are among 5,500 hotel workers organized by the Confederation of National Trade Unions at 35 hotels across the province that have been fight-

ing on a unified platform. Many hotels have already settled with four-year contracts, where workers have won yearly 3 percent wage increases, 2 percent increases in employer pension funds, and some protection from job cuts due to “green” programs. (Clients staying several nights pay less, but rooms are not cleaned and towels are not changed every day.)

“The green plan affects all kinds of jobs: the laundry, the chambermaids, everything cascades,” Michel Dionne, who has 25 years seniority and does technical maintenance, told the *Militant*.

Local union President Robin St-Pierre said workers are demanding an hourly increase of 60 cents in addition to the increase won in other hotels “in order to catch up a little.” Chambermaids here make \$14.09 an hour compared to \$19.62 at the Montreal Hyatt Regency.

“The union wants to freeze in time the way the workforce is organized,” Herman Champagne, SilverBirch Hotels’ corporate director of labor relations, told the *Militant*.

Mirta Barboza, a chambermaid for five years, said she has 30 minutes to clean a room, 14 rooms per day.

“There are about 40 positions in the kitchen that need to be filled,” said André Trépannier, a cook for 27 years. “Now they force us to do overtime.”

—Annette Kouri

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



November 27, 1987

SHERIDAN, Wyo.—The battle between striking United Mine Workers of America members and coal bosses Peter Kiewit & Sons and Nerco Coal is escalating here.

Some 240 UMWA Local 1972 members have been on strike at the Decker Coal Co. strip mine, which is just across the state line in Montana, since early October. The 44 members of UMWA Local 2055 who work at Big Horn Coal Co.’s mine near Sheridan went out a few days later.

The strikes have been a real battle from the beginning. The coal bosses, courts, and area cops are trying to break the strike—and if possible, the union—by bringing in scabs.

The miners and their supporters have responded by organizing a series of peaceful sit-down blockades on the roads into the mines to prevent the scabs from getting through.



November 26, 1962

NEW YORK—The FBI round-up of Cubans here on charges of conspiring to commit sabotage is a deliberate hoax designed to deepen anti-Cuban hysteria.

The witch-hunting character of the Justice Department move is apparent from the few hard facts that can be sifted from the screaming headlines and lurid stories of plans to destroy department stores and oil refineries in the New York area and to unleash a reign of terror in the city.

In the nearly four years since the Cuban Revolution, there has not been a single act of sabotage committed or even charged in this country. But the U.S. government has been indisputably linked to the very kind of sabotage in Cuba it now charges against those arrested here. Saboteurs didn’t simply “conspire” to plant incendiary bombs in Cuban department stores. They actually burned down Havana’s biggest store.



November 27, 1937

All indications in the national scene point to a wholesale offensive against the living standards of the American workers, both in the industrial as well as in the political field. The past week has witnessed a further sharp drop in employment figures, organized threats on the part of the bosses against the incipient resistance of the workers to this trend and a marked tendency on the part of Congress and the administration to act more openly as the direct agency of the capitalists in their efforts to unload the burden of the onrushing depression upon labor’s shoulders.

Linked up with this strategy follows an onslaught on the gains made by the trade unions in the past period. That is why the bosses are especially alarmed at the militancy of the auto workers in Michigan and the rubber workers in Ohio, who have begun to reply to the layoff campaign with sit-down strikes.

JACK BARNES

THE CHANGING FACE OF U.S. POLITICS

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Seattle: Activists targeted by FBI refuse to testify before grand jury

BY CECELIA MORIARITY

SEATTLE—Matthew Pfeiffer, 23, of Portland, Ore., is the latest political activist in the region to take a stand against an FBI-grand jury probe here.

On Oct. 25, Pfeiffer was served a federal grand jury subpoena by two FBI agents. The hearing date, originally set for Nov. 7, was subsequently postponed until Dec. 14.

Pfeiffer is the fifth political activist to be subpoenaed since July in what the FBI claims is an ongoing investigation targeting area anarchist groups for “a violent crime in Seattle on May Day.”

Standing on their constitutional rights, the activists are refusing to answer questions about their politics and political associates to help an FBI probe into area activists.

“I knew my fate right away: 18 months in SeaTac Federal Detention Center,” Pfeiffer said in an Oct. 29 statement announcing his refusal to testify. “Some have said the Grand Jury is about trying to repress people’s political opinions and free speech and no doubt this is true.”

On May 1 a federal courthouse door in Seattle was damaged and some bank

and shop windows were broken by individuals dressed in black.

The Seattle police arrested eight people for vandalism damages unrelated to the courthouse door and dropped charges on five. The other three pleaded guilty; two are serving suspended sentences and one spent two months in jail.

May Day was a national day of marches and rallies attended by thousands across the country demanding legalization for undocumented workers.

Some 1,500 people marched in Seattle in an immigrant rights action organized by the Immigration Reform and Social Justice Committee, backed by student and religious groups and more than a dozen unions. Occupy Seattle organized another action.

“We are working with members of Occupy Seattle to make each of our events both safe and effective,” the committee said in a statement released April 29. “We in no way encourage the dissemination of any information that encourages our participants to engage in reckless, poorly thought-out activities.”

Prior to May 1, the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force began spying on



Courtesy of Committee Against Political Repression

Leah-Lynn Plante, left, stands beside Dennison Williams at protest in Portland, Ore., Aug. 1 announcing their refusal to cooperate in FBI-grand jury probe in Seattle. They had received subpoenas to testify before grand jury after FBI raided their residences the week before.

a number of anarchists in Portland, including tracking six of them while they traveled to Seattle.

In September and October Matthew Duran, 24, and Katherine Olejnik, 23, of Olympia, Wash., and Leah-Lynn Plante, 24, of Portland, were convicted of civil contempt for refusing to answer questions before the grand jury about their political beliefs and the names of other political activists they know. They were told they would be held in the SeaTac detention cen-

ter for 18 months, until the grand jury session ends, unless they recanted and answered all the government’s questions.

Plante was released Oct. 17 after seven days in solitary confinement. Duran and Olejnik remain in detention.

Dennison Williams from Portland was also subpoenaed to an earlier grand jury. He released a statement together with Plante refusing to cooperate. Williams’ subpoena was then dropped, reported the Committee Against Political Repression.

More than 60 people attended a panel discussion Nov. 5 at the Seattle University School of Law protesting the Northwest grand jury and discussing the ongoing fight against its use. The event was sponsored by the law school’s National Lawyers Guild.

More than 200 community organizations have signed a letter of support for those targeted by the FBI in the Northwest and in a similar attack in the Midwest aimed at antiwar and political activists in Chicago and Minneapolis in 2010.

Hospitals to be rewarded for ‘saving’ on Medicare patients

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Starting Oct. 1, under the Barack Obama administration’s Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act—better known as “Obamacare”—hospitals that spend less on Medicare patients will be awarded bonus payments.

This is part of the act’s plans to slash the program, which provides subsidized health care for those over 65 years and the disabled, by \$716 billion over the next decade.

This “will result in fewer knee replacements, hip replacements, angioplasty, bypass surgery and cataract operations,” writes Betsy McCaughey, former lieutenant governor of New York, in an Oct. 11 *Investor’s Business Daily* column titled “Obama Administration Dooms Seniors to Ravages of Aging.”

This change “is the beginning of a transition from paying hospitals on the basis of the amount of care they provide,” reports Kaiser Health News. Instead, the government is now putting in place what it euphemistically calls a “value-based purchasing” program—its opposite.

Under this plan Medicare payments to hospitals will be cut by 1 percent this fiscal year. These funds will be set aside in a bonus pool to pay hospitals “based on performance” up to \$850 million annually for implementing spending cuts. More than 3,000 acute care hospitals are part of this program as of Oct. 1. The bonus pool will increase to 2 percent of Medicare payments in 2016.

These and other hospital cutbacks under the Obamacare plan adversely affect the quality of care available to seniors and will make it more difficult to find doctors and hospitals willing to accept them.

Richard Foster, chief actuary for Medicare, told Congress last year that 15 percent of hospitals may stop treating those under the program once Obamacare cuts take effect, writes McCaughey. By 2030, this could rise

to 25 percent, according to a Medicare trustees 2012 report.

Those getting care will also find fewer nurses having to treat a greater number of patients, as hospitals lay off more health care workers as part of cutting their costs of operation.

“Research sponsored by the National Institute on Aging,” wrote McCaughey, “shows that heart attack patients at the lowest-spending hospitals are 19%

more likely to die than patients of the same age at higher-spending hospitals. Yet the Obama health law pushes all hospitals to imitate the lowest spending ones.”

Also taking effect in October are cuts to hospitals that have “excess” readmissions for patients with heart attacks, heart failure and pneumonia, and cuts to hospice care. Earlier this year Medicare reduced dialysis treatment services.

FBI expands ‘terror’ probe of Somalis in Minneapolis

BY FRANK FORRESTAL

MINNEAPOLIS—Just days after convicting Somali janitor Mahamud Said Omar on multiple “terrorism” charges, the FBI arrested another Somali youth and expanded its several-year investigation of the Somali community here into one the community’s schools.

Omer Abdi Mohamed, 27, was arrested Oct. 24 for allegedly playing a “key role” in recruiting Somali youth to fight in Somalia alongside al-Shabab, an Islamist group at war with U.S.-backed forces in the country.

U.S. District Judge Michael Davis ordered the jailing of Mohamed on the basis of testimony from FBI agent Uri

Rosenwald, the trial of Said Omar and testimony of Mohamed’s probation officer.

Davis said the trial of Said Omar proved to him that a “treacherous web” had been “exposed under oath by a number of witnesses”—witnesses who were all working for the FBI or faced similar charges and testified against Said Omar in exchange for accepting charges carrying lighter sentences.

The three-hour court hearing was packed with some 50 friends and relatives of Mohamed. One reporter from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* noted that “the judge’s decision did not sit well with them.”

According to press reports, Mohamed was charged with providing material support to terrorists and faces a possible life sentence. He accepted a plea bargain, entering a guilty plea to one conspiracy count, which carries a maximum term of 15 years.

Mohamed had been free on bond since July 2011. Federal prosecutors claim he violated his release terms by not reporting to his probation officer that he had gotten a job at the Essential Learning of Minnesota Institute, a school that caters to Somali youth.

“He was a volunteer with the school and that isn’t a violation of his parole,” Peter Wold, Mohamed’s attorney, said in a phone interview.

The evidence used against Mo-

hamed is based on FBI interrogations of Somali parents of children at the school. One said Mohamed was a director and was involved in religious training.

“It appears that what is going on at the school represents a great danger to the community,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles Kovats said at the hearing.

“Hearsay normally isn’t allowed, but in cases of violating probation it is,” Wold explained.

“I’m disturbed,” Bruce Nestor, the school’s attorney, told the Associated Press. “Without facts, other than association and innuendo, to somehow try to link this school to a so-called terror network.”

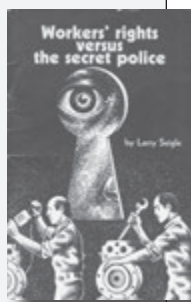
The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* ran a front-page interview with FBI Supervisory Special Agent E.K. Wilson Oct. 26 titled, “Minneapolis Janitor’s Trial Exposes Trail of Minnesota’s Terror Pipeline.” Wilson describes how the FBI probe, known as Operation Rhino, directed at the Somali community is “one of the largest counterterrorism campaigns since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States by Al-Qaida.” Wilson said the operation “has received attention at the highest levels of U.S. government, including the White House” and the “investigation is less than half-way complete.”

Workers’ Rights versus the Secret Police

by Larry Seigle

Since the inception of the modern revolutionary workers movement in 1848, the ruling classes have responded with police spies, agents provocateurs and political frame-ups.—\$5

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Communist Manifesto on abolition of bourgeois property

Below is an excerpt from *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, one of *Pathfinder's Books of the Month* for November. The founding document of the modern communist workers movement was published in 1848 on the verge of a series of revolutions across Europe. Copyright © 1987 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

BY KARL MARX
AND FREDERICK ENGELS

The communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mold the proletarian movement.

The communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: (1) In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. (2) In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and



Detail of Pathfinder Mural (1989-1996) in New York includes depiction of workers' struggle for shorter workday, a fight hailed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*.

everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

The immediate aim of the communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

The theoretical conclusions of the communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of communism.

All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.

The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favor of

bourgeois property.

The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few.

In this sense, the theory of the communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.

We communists have been reproached with the desire of abolishing the right of personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man's own labor, which property is alleged to be the groundwork of all personal freedom, activity, and independence. ...

Do you mean the property of the petty artisan and of the small peasant, a form of property that preceded the bourgeois form? There is no need to abolish that; the development of industry has to a great extent already destroyed it and is still destroying it daily.

Or do you mean modern bourgeois private property?

But does wage labor create any property for the laborer? Not a bit. It creates capital, i.e., that kind of property which exploits wage labor and which cannot increase except upon conditions of begetting a new supply of wage labor for fresh exploitation.

Property, in its present form, is based on the antagonism of capital and wage labor. Let us examine both sides of this antagonism.

To be a capitalist is to have not only a purely personal, but a social *status* in production. Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay, in the last resort, only by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion.

Capital is, therefore, not a personal, it is a social power.

When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character.

Let us now take wage labor.

The average price of wage labor is the minimum wage, i.e., that quantum of the means of subsistence which is absolutely requisite to keep the laborer in bare existence as a laborer. What, therefore, the wage-laborer appropriates by means of his labor merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence. We by no means intend to abolish this personal appropriation of the products of labor, an appropriation that is made for the maintenance and reproduction of human life and that leaves no surplus wherewith to command the labor of others. All that we want to do away with is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the laborer lives merely to increase capital and is allowed to live only insofar as the interest of the ruling class requires it. ...

You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its nonexistence in the hands of those nine-tenths. You reproach us, therefore, with intending to do away with a form of property, the necessary condition for whose existence is the nonexistence of any property for the immense majority of society.

In one word, you reproach us with intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend.

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S. Africa farmworkers strike

Continued from front page

now involves more than 12,000 farmworkers, mostly at vineyards near the town of De Doorns, where table grapes for export and wine are produced. There are some 8,000 permanent and 8,000 seasonal workers in the vineyards.

Many farmworkers make 70 rand (\$8) a day. Strikers are demanding a minimum wage of 150 rand a day. The capitalist farmers offered 80 rand.

Some 8,000 farmworkers and their supporters marched in support of their demands Nov. 6.

Agri Wes-Cape, an association of farm owners, said in a Nov. 10 statement that “the list of demands from worker representatives included higher wages, improved living conditions, free electricity, an end to illegal evictions, [an end to hiring] illegal immigrant workers and a ban on labour [contractors].”

“The irony of this specific case,” the association complained, “is that the farmers in De Doorns and the rest of the Hex River Valley pay workers above the prescribed minimum wage.”

“The foreign workers and South African workers are pulling well together,” Tony Ehrenreich, provincial secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions in the Western Cape, told the *Militant* Nov. 12, in answer to the company’s reference to immigrant workers in its statement. Attempts to divide the workers, many of whom are from Mozambique and Lesotho, will not succeed, he said.

In a call for a Nov. 13 demonstration, COSATU said that “Marikana has come to farms!!!” a reference to the successful strike by platinum workers at Lonmin’s Marikana mine in the North West province. The platinum miners won a 22 percent increase Sept. 18 after a five-week strike in which cops killed 34 miners. COSATU is the country’s main trade union federation, which the NUM is part of.

“The farmworker fight is like the mine strikes in that the strike was started by workers on their own. Only 20 percent of the workers are unionized,” Ehrenreich said. “It is different than in the mines because in the mines there was a vacuum of leadership. Here the officials of COSATU unions have a lot of legitimacy among the workers. At least this time we are supporting and helping to lead the strike.”

Ongoing miners’ battles

“We are going to start the third month of our strike tomorrow,” underground mineworker Gaddafi Mdoda, a representative of striking miners at Amplats in South Africa’s North West province, said in a phone interview Nov. 12. “It is quite difficult but we will survive because this strike is to promote a better life.”

A strike wave among miners in the country peaked in October, with more than 100,000 workers at gold, platinum, chrome, and other mines demanding substantial pay increases. Most of the strikes were organized by committees selected by the workers outside the structures of the National Union of Mineworkers, frequently described by strikers as too close to the bosses and government. The walkouts were “unprotected,” conducted outside of the regulations and red tape of South African labor law.

While the strikes at AngloGold, Harmony Gold, and Gold Fields, the three largest gold companies in the country, ended after the companies agreed to increase wages by moving workers to the next pay grade, Amplats has dug in its heels, claiming that a raise would bankrupt the company.

In a Nov. 9 statement, Amplats said if workers ended the strike it would pay a 2,000 rand “hardship allowance” and a 2,500 rand “safe start-up allowance” to be paid two weeks after the return to work—a total of just over \$500. Eleven days earlier strikers rejected a similar 2,500 rand package.

Amplats, the largest platinum mining company in the world, said that as part of a back-to-work agreement it would open new wage negotiations ahead of schedule but that there could be no wage increases until after July 1, 2013.

“What they are talking about is a one-off payment,” Mdoda said. “But that is not a wage offer.” Strikers are demanding a doubling of their wages from less than \$1,000 a month to about \$1,800.

The strikers continue to face police intimidation, he added, with some 20 strikers in jail on frame-up charges of incitement to violence and intimidation.

The struggles are ongoing at mines where strikers have returned to work.

Workers fight 15-month lockout by American Crystal

BY FRANK FORRESTAL

MINNEAPOLIS—With no resolution on the horizon, the 15-month-long fight in the Upper Midwest between locked-out members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union and American Crystal Sugar is at an impasse. While willing to negotiate, the workers have refused to accept deep concessions demanded by the largest sugar beet producer in the U.S.

Workers have rejected the company’s concession contracts three times—the first by 96 percent, the second by 90 percent, the last, by a margin of 63 percent, this past June.

Company demands include replacing some union jobs with nonunion contract workers, ending seniority as the basis for recalling workers after seasonal layoffs, expanding second-tier workers, the ability to increase health care costs at whim, and eliminating health coverage at retirement for new hires.

“Our offer is still out there, and I think it’s a very good offer,” said Brian Ingulsrud, a vice president of American Crystal, in a recent interview with the Associated Press.

“They never really negotiated with us,” Wayne Netterlund, a locked-out worker from Drayton, N.D., told the *Militant*. When the union made counteroffers that included concessions, the company said the union didn’t go far enough.

“All of us want to go back to work, but they’d like to see us crawl back,” Steve Eliason, a locked-out worker from Hillsboro, N.D., said last fall.

As the lockout dragged on, more and more workers, who receive a weekly union stipend of \$100, found other work. Others were forced to retire. The number of retired workers and those who have resigned from the company by taking another job is now more than

Spain: Nationwide strike protests gov’t austerity



Reuters/ Marcelo del Pozo

Union members march in Seville, Spain, Nov. 14, during 24-hour nationwide protest strike. Millions of workers across Europe went on strike or joined labor actions to protest government-driven cuts to social services and high unemployment in the largest Europe-wide action by organized labor since the economic crisis began three years ago.

In Spain and Portugal, hundreds of flights were cancelled, car factories and ports were at a standstill and trains barely ran.

Unemployment has risen to 26 percent in Spain. More than 25 million people are out of work in Europe.

—LOUIS MARTIN

“The situation is not normal exactly,” Gold Fields rock driller Jonathan Monere told the *Militant* in a phone interview. “The company is victimiz-

ing, dismissing, or suspending some workers because of the strike action. Some problems could cause us to go on strike again.”

400 and growing. Some 1,300 were locked out by American Crystal Aug. 1, 2011.

“I’m never going back,” Brad Nelson, former vice president of the Drayton local, told the *Militant*. “For my own personal health, the anger and hate I feel for the company, I have to move on. I’m looking to get in another plant, hopefully one that is union.”

More than 400 locked-out workers from the two North Dakota plants, in Drayton and Hillsboro, have been denied unemployment benefits by the North Dakota Job Service. Benefits have also run out for workers from the Minnesota plants in the Red River Valley.

On behalf of some 230 North Dakota workers, the union appealed to the state Supreme Court Sept. 18 a district court order supporting the state’s decision to deny unemployment compensation. The court has up to 90 days to decide.

As the months passed and the union rejected the second contract proposal Nov. 1, 2011, the locked-out workers organized food drives, weekly “scab change” picket rallies at all the plants in the valley, fundraising efforts sponsored by unions throughout the region, and solidarity caravans, including a six-state “Journey for Justice” trip with Steelworkers locked out by Cooper Tire.

A few days before the one-year anniversary of the lockout, Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO, announced at a press conference in St. Paul that the federation was organizing a national campaign against American Crystal Sugar. “The campaign will escalate until American Crystal negotiates,” the AFL-CIO president said.

A couple months later the AFL-CIO announced a national consumer boycott of American Crystal Sugar products. Locked-out sugar workers have been going to stores across the Red River

Valley—the region of eastern North Dakota and northwest Minnesota where American Crystal plants are located—asking working people to support their struggle by not buying American Crystal Sugar products.

“Every day union picketers protest at stores in the morning and evening,” Becki Jacobson, a locked-out worker from the Moorhead plant, told the *Militant*. “We have been getting a good response, lots of honks and waves, some thumbs up, as well as some who flip us off, but they are a small minority.”

“We should give the boycott a chance even though it was called very late in the game,” Russell Grandstrand, a locked-out worker from Drayton, told the *Militant*. “It might just be a flash in the pan.”

“A very small percentage of the sugar is sold in stores, the rest goes direct to the big candy and cereal companies,” said Grandstrand, who now works at an electronic parts factory.

American Crystal sells sugar across the country. Outside the Red River Valley the AFL-CIO boycott campaign mainly involves a petition on the Internet asking people to sign a boycott pledge.

About 10 locked-out workers got hired this past summer at a unionized bus plant near the Canadian border in Pembina, N.D. Not long after workers there rejected a proposed contract and took a couple of strike votes.

“Not only am I locked out, I may also be on strike,” former sugar worker C.J. Hanson, now at the plant, told the *Militant* with a grin on his face.

In September workers at the bus factory, organized by the Machinists, approved a three-year contract that included a small wage increase, health coverage and a \$1,000 signing bonus.

Tony Lane contributed to this article.

Young farmers help boost Cuba's food production

Working people from city, countryside respond to distribution of millions of acres of idle land

BY ÓLÖF ANDRA PROPPÉ
AND JONATHAN SILBERMAN

SAN ANTONIO DE LOS BAÑOS, Cuba—Farmers at the Vicente Pérez Noa cooperative here are part of a nationwide effort by Cuban working people and their revolutionary government to boost food production. The goal is to meet the population's needs and become less dependent on costly food imports.

One of the Cuban government's most substantial measures in recent years to confront this challenge has been the distribution of millions of acres of idle land—free—to anyone who will farm it. Since the adoption four years ago of Decree-Law 259, which authorized this move, tens of thousands of working people from the cities and the countryside have responded, including a significant number of young people.

To learn more about these efforts, *Militant* reporters visited the Vicente Pérez Noa cooperative, located in this town in Artemisa province 25 miles southwest of Havana.

"I wanted to make a contribution to producing food," said Yuniel González Paneque, 29, president of the cooperative. He took over the farm from his grandfather.

The cooperative has been productive and growing, González noted. "In June 2010 we had 165 members—this year we have 190." Of these, 34 farmers are younger than 35. Twenty-seven are women.

Forty-six became members after starting to farm abandoned land that was incorporated into the coop.

Since Decree-Law 259 was adopted in 2008, 194,000 Cubans have applied for land, of whom 173,000 received grants totaling more than 3.5 million acres across the island.

As long as they cultivate the land, individual farmers have the right to use it for 10 years, with the possibility of extending that term another 10 years. Cooperatives asking for additional land are given use of it for 25 years. In both cases if they cease to farm the land, they forfeit custody.

The initial measure approved in 2008 allowed an individual to apply for up to 33 acres, with a limit of 100 acres on the total size of their farm. Farmers could not pass this land to relatives or others.

The law was modified in July of this year in response to initial experiences and requests from farmers. Now individuals can request up to 165 acres, and can transfer land to family members or to others working the land with the farmer if the original title holder dies. Families are now permitted to build homes on the land as well.

Like all land in Cuba since the agrarian reform of the first years of the revolution, the land remains nationalized—it cannot be bought or sold as a commodity. The nationalization of the land is among the measures carried out by the revolutionary government that ended farmers' debt slavery and guaranteed that Cuban peasants would not lose their land by being forced to sell their property to pay off debts or face foreclosure. It also resulted in a considerable improvement in the amount and

quality of food consumed by urban workers in the country.

Youth working in agriculture

The visit to Vicente Pérez Noa was organized by the Union of Young Communists (UJC), the youth organization of the Cuban Communist Party, which has campaigned to convince greater numbers of young people to farm. Over the decades many in the countryside have migrated to the cities, especially young people attracted to the opportunities to take up professional occupations and office jobs.

"We can't have a situation where there are more young people working as doctors or lawyers than in production," said UJC leader Jorge Sutil, who met us at the coop. Sutil is the UJC National Bureau member responsible for work with young workers, farmers and soldiers.

"In 2008 the average age of those engaged in farming was over 50," noted Mercedes Santana, National Bureau member of the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP). Santana also joined the discussions with the visitors, along with two local ANAP leaders, Yamila Sarduy of the Artemisa provincial bureau and Georgina Jiménez Pérez, president of the municipal ANAP in San Antonio de los Baños.

In recent years the average age of the agricultural workforce has come down somewhat. More than a quarter of the new farmers are 35 or younger, with little or no previous farming experience, according to Pedro Olivera, director of the Ministry of Agriculture's National Land Control Center, quoted in *CubaDebate*.

At the Vicente Pérez Noa cooperative, in addition to González *Militant* reporters met three other young farmers: Hendris Blanco and José Alberto Hernández, both 28, and Yendri Pérez, 24. All cooperative members under 35 meet as a group to take up the specific issues they face.

González is also an active member of the UJC. In 2010 he was chosen to be part of the Cuban delegation to the World Festival of Youth and Students in South Africa, as was Sutil.

Sutil noted that the abundance of



Militant/Maura DeLuca

Members of Vicente Pérez Noa farm cooperative in San Antonio de los Baños, southwest of Havana, prepare soil mix for seedlings, February 2012. Coop has won new members who received land distributed through Decree-Law 259. Since adoption of 2008 law, tens of thousands have started to farm 3.5 million acres of previously idle land.

idle land in Cuba—more than 4.3 million acres at the start of the process—is to a large extent a consequence of the Special Period, the economic crisis of the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Cuba abruptly lost the bulk of its aid and 85 percent of its foreign trade. Agricultural production was decimated by shortages of imported fuel, fertilizer, insecticides, equipment and spare parts. Millions of acres of previously cultivated land were abandoned and overrun with a dense thorny bush called *marabú*.

Through the efforts of working people and their government, economic production, including in agriculture, has picked up from the most difficult period of the mid-1990s. But the economy remains marked by the consequences of the Special Period, compounded by the intensification of the five-decade-long U.S. economic embargo, and now the impact of the world capitalist economic crisis. These conditions exacerbate long-standing problems of centralized mismanagement and leadership challenges that reduce

agricultural productivity and hobble food production and distribution.

A recent evaluation of the farm cooperatives known as Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPC) showed that of the 2,500 UBPCs established nearly 20 years ago, fewer than 2,000 remain, and of those, only 540 are "in a favorable economic and productive situation," and have adequate leadership, *Granma* reported Sept. 11. Some 23 percent of UBPC land sits idle.

The UBPCs were abruptly created in 1993 at the height of the economic collapse of the Special Period. The vast state farms, the majority devoted to sugarcane, were broken into smaller production units and turned over to the workers on those farms to run. Unlike the large state farms, members of these cooperatives own the fruits of their labor and have more say over the use of the land and other resources. In practice, however, they often remained closely tied to state sugar and agricultural enterprises and subordinate to their decisions, *Granma* reported.

In August 2012, Cuba's National Assembly approved a series of measures aimed at allowing the UBPCs to become more like the other agricultural cooperatives in Cuba, which are more independent of state bodies in making decisions. The goal is for UBPC members to take a greater role in the planning and control of production, and the distribution of revenues, according to *Granma*. Government subsidies to failing UBPCs will be ended and some 300 UBPCs deemed financially "unrecoverable" will be merged with others or dissolved, their lands made available for distribution.

Decentralizing local decisions

"The government has implemented other measures aimed at increasing production," González said. "More agricultural decisions are being made at the municipal level rather than in offices of the Ministry of Agriculture

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Cuban food production

Continued from page 9

at the provincial and national levels. Local stores that sell farm supplies and equipment have been established and cheap credit is available to buy these necessities.”

“My grandfather and I were able to get a loan of 50,000 pesos to tide us over while we got started,” said Hendris Blanco.

Such loans are needed “because it takes time before you get your first harvest,” González noted. “You have to clear the land of marabú and get the necessary supplies and equipment. And then you have to learn to farm productively.”

The government has also increased the prices paid to the farmers for their produce. González, who has 25 dairy cows and also raises beef cattle and pigs, is a beneficiary of the increased milk price.

“The state buys milk from us at 2.5 pesos per liter and sells it at 25 centavos per liter to consumers entitled to it on their ration cards—children under 7 and adults who need milk for medical reasons. That’s one of Cuba’s priorities—getting farmers to increase the supply of food while keeping prices down for the people.”

This is the opposite, of course, of what happens in capitalist countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, where food monopolies drive down prices paid to small farmers—sometimes making it impossible for them to meet their production costs—while increasing prices that working people pay in stores.

In all, the cooperative has 120 dairy cows, 100 bulls being raised for slaughter or sale, and 50 pigs.

Producing food for sales to state distribution agencies—to be sold to the population at subsidized prices—comes first when setting production plans for the year, said González.

“Once we’ve fulfilled our contracts with the state, we can make direct sales to the tourist sector—like hotels or restaurants—or take produce to the agricultural markets. Before, all food distribution was through the *acopio*,” he said, referring to the state warehousing and distribution system, “but now we can deliver our products directly.”

Farmers pay a 2 percent tax on sales to state-run agricultural markets, and 5 percent on other sales.

Vicente Pérez Noa is a Credit and Services Cooperative (CCS). In these, farm families work their own land individually but share credit facilities, equipment, services and help each other as needed. The other kind of farm coop created in the early years of the revolution is the Agricultural Production Cooperative (CPA), where members give up individual title to their land and work the entire spread jointly. Small farmers, most of them members of a CCS or CPA, account for more than half the food produced in Cuba, though two-thirds of cultivated land is farmed by the UBPCs and state farms.

The Vicente Pérez Noa, like other cooperatives in Cuba, is run by an executive board elected by its members. The membership meets regularly to discuss and decide on crops to be planted, expenditures and distribution of revenues, as well as to share experiences to help improve production.

All members of these cooperatives, including those who received land under Decree-Law 259, are members of ANAP, whose membership has increased by more than 50,000 since 2008. (UBPC members continue to belong to the National Sugar Workers Union, not ANAP.) The bulk of the new farmers have joined CCSs, whose area of cultivation is growing as a result of the measure.

Despite the measures being taken, food production in Cuba continues to fall far short of domestic needs, and working people are paying higher prices for the food they eat.

Only a small number of food items are available through the ration book which is being gradually eliminated. Through the *libreta*, as it is known, Cubans have been able to buy certain necessities at heavily subsidized prices. For many families, however, the monthly allotments last at most for a couple of weeks. Moreover, products are not always available in the state markets and quality is often poor.

As a result, millions of Cubans shop in the “agricultural markets,” where prices—set by supply and demand—are considerably higher. They also purchase food from street vendors, who buy products at the markets and resell them at higher prices from their carts.

“Black beans are 8 pesos a pound in state markets but 12 pesos from



Militant photos by Jonathan Silberman (above) and Róger Calero (inset)

Above: Militant reporters speak with Yuniel González, second from left, president of Vicente Pérez Noa cooperative. González, 29, took over farm from his grandfather. “Increasing food supply while keeping prices down for the people is a priority,” he said. Goal is to reduce dependence on costly imports. Inset: González milking one of coop’s 120 dairy cows.

individual vendors,” a retired worker in Havana, José Martínez, told the *Militant*. “Cucumbers from private individuals are more than double the state market price. Guavas cost three times as much,” Martínez said.

The high prices paid to farmers for their products have resulted in growing class differentiation, with a layer of small farmers earning much more than other working people.

González, for example, said his anticipated net income this year will be half a million pesos. He employs three agricultural workers at 60 pesos a day. The average wage of a worker in Cuba is around 5,000 pesos annually, which is less than 20 pesos a day.

This situation has generated discussion and debate, and palpable tensions. Some workers are resentful of the wide income gap that has developed in recent years between these farmers and most Cubans. Others note that a bigger problem is the fact there has been a layer of quite wealthy working farmers for some time.

Asked what she thought, María Eugenia Arnet, 62, a production worker at the Labiofam bio chemical company in Havana, said she had no complaints. “Whatever makes more food available at lower prices is a good thing,” said Arnet, whose combined earnings from her wages and pension is about 7,000 pesos a year.

Some farmers, including González and Blanco, are dismissive of workers who say their wages are too low to afford the rising food prices. “They should do what we’re doing,” González said.

The outcome of the efforts to boost food production will weigh heavily in class relations over the coming years. But it will take time for changes to be felt. Agricultural production grew by just 2 percent in 2011. Currently some 80 percent of the food distributed through the ration book system is imported. Cuba’s dependency on imported food as a percentage of the total food consumption on the island, however, is less than 20 percent.

Rising prices on the world market drain resources from much-needed investments in basic infrastructure

and equipment that would boost productivity. Food imports cost Cuba \$1.4 billion in 2007 and rose to \$1.5 billion in 2011. In 2008, following three hurricanes that devastated domestic crops, the food import bill soared to over \$2.5 billion.

A real improvement in workers’ living standards and a reversal of an income differentiation that can over time put increasing strains on the alliance of Cuban workers and farmers is possible and sustainable only if there is a major rise in industrial as well as agricultural production.

Parallel efforts to involve young workers in boosting industrial production are also necessary, Sutil noted. But the possibility of turning around agriculture in the shorter term makes this the immediate priority, he said.

Róger Calero, Martín Koppel and Mary-Alice Waters contributed to this article.



Meeting to form farm cooperative in Cárdenas, Cuba, early 1960s. Nationalization of land and other revolutionary measures ended debt slavery and guaranteed land to those who farm it.

Our History Is Still Being Written

The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution

by Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, Moisés Sío Wong

The story of three young rebels of Chinese-Cuban ancestry who threw themselves into the great proletarian battle that defined their generation. They became combatants in the clandestine struggle and 1956–58 revolutionary war that brought down a U.S.-backed dictatorship and opened the door to the socialist revolution in the Americas. Each became a general in Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces. Also available in Spanish. **\$20**

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Emergency gov’t relief, jobs now!

The *Militant* joins with working people demanding restoration of power and emergency government aid for those bearing the brunt of the social catastrophe unfolding in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, a disaster which is magnified a hundredfold by social relations under capitalism.

Two weeks after the storm hit, tens of thousands are still lacking some basic necessities, such as housing, food, power, water and gas. Immediate relief should address these social needs.

Government politicians say they are doing all they can with available resources. This is the biggest lie of all. Human labor is both what is needed and what is not being brought to bear.

This underscores the need to fight for a massive, public works program to provide jobs, both to lessen the competition among workers bred by high unemployment and address the physical devastation and social dislocation left in the hurricane’s wake.

Such a program could focus now on rebuilding and constructing new housing, medical centers, schools, child care centers; on repairing neglected infrastructure such as public transportation, roads, bridges, tunnels and power grids; on taking the measures to be prepared for future storms; and on providing services working people need.

The starting point of the propertied rulers and their government has been to minimize what the storm costs them and put the needs of working people last.

Millions have been kept in the dark both literally

and figuratively. Keeping people in the hardest hit areas informed about what is going on, or even where they are being taken seems too much to ask.

For those burdened without a place to stay, the response is to minimize the “burden” on private property—treating evacuees like a nuisance, or like criminals, as some told the *Militant*. Hundreds have been forced to live under a tent, as schools and other more comfortable accommodations shut their doors. Making hotels and motels in the region available free of charge is not even considered. These establishments are instead jacking up their prices to match rising demand. The rulers feign “empathy,” but they have no sympathy. This stands in contrast to numerous examples of solidarity and efforts by working people to help each other through the situation. Think of what could be unleashed if these steps were backed and organized by massive government resources.

This is what is taking place today in revolutionary Cuba, which was even harder hit by the hurricane. There work brigades from all across the island have been mobilized to aid in Santiago and other devastated cities, backed by resources from a government that represents the interests and political power of the island’s workers and farmers.

This is what workers in the U.S. need—a revolution to take the power out of the hands of the capitalists and replace it with the political power of the working class, which will prioritize the needs of the vast majority, not the profits of a tiny handful.

Quebec student striker found guilty of ‘contempt’

BY BEVERLY BERNARDO

MONTREAL—On Nov. 1 Quebec Superior Court Justice Denis Jacques found former student leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois guilty of contempt of court for urging protesters to continue with pickets despite an injunction granted to Laval University student Jean-François Morasse allowing him to return to classes.

Nadeau-Dubois was a spokesperson for Classe, the largest of three student federations involved in a successful monthslong fight that mobilized tens of thousands of students and their supporters against tuition fee hikes earlier this year in Quebec.

Morasse filed a complaint after Nadeau-Dubois in a television interview May 13 encouraged students to maintain their picket lines. Under Quebec’s code of Civil Procedure, Nadeau-Dubois faces fines as high as \$50,000 and up to one year in jail. The day of the ruling 200 people marched here in his support.

Nadeau-Dubois announced Nov. 3 his decision to appeal the conviction, saying that it sets a dangerous precedent for any spokesperson to speak out for fear of going to jail. In response to a call he made for aid, more than 1,700 people contributed \$58,000 in 48 hours.

The teachers federation of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) issued a press release Nov. 6 backing Nadeau-Dubois. “Unions often face injunctions during labor disputes. The ruling against Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois threatens unionists,” Caroline Senneville, president of the federation, told the *Militant* Nov. 9.

Workers stand on dignity in wake of Hurricane Sandy

Continued from front page

The homes of hundreds of residents of Seaside Heights, N.J., were destroyed. Many have been placed in “Camp Freedom,” a tent city set up by the New Jersey state government at Monmouth Park racetrack in Oceanport, N.J.

Dan Cecere Jr., a disabled worker, was one of the town residents sent to the tent city. “The National Guard told us to go to the police—they are going to evacuate you,” he told the *Militant*. “If you stay, they’ll arrest you. They had drug dogs. They treated us like criminals.”

After two days in tents, some residents were moved across the street to the track’s four-story grandstand building. Everyone staying there has to have a photo ID. There are security guards at every door. Even to go to the bathroom evacuees have to show their badge.

Corey Goodwin, 24, a cashier, is staying in the grandstand building with his family. The school his five-year-old son goes to in Seaside Heights was washed away. “They won’t let him go to the local school here, because he has the wrong address,” Goodwin told the *Militant*.

“It’s like a prison in here, lots of police making you feel uncomfortable,” Goodwin said. “We’re getting pushed around and no one knows how long this will last.”

Painter and handyman Mike Beason, 49, also from Seaside Heights, was in his second shelter since the storm when he was told he would have to move again.

“Yesterday they said we were being moved from the church to the racetrack,” he told the *Militant* Nov. 10. “The bus was halfway here when it turned around and returned to the church. We unpacked all our stuff. Then they said, ‘Pack up, we are going to the racetrack.’ When we got here we waited for two hours in the bus. We couldn’t even go out to have a smoke.”

Beason said there are 250 people in his section, from sick and crying babies to people without medication. “No one knows what the hell is going on,” he said. “I’ve already signed up with FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] in two places, but now I have to sign up again.”

Lack of gov’t preparation

More information is coming to light about the lack of preparation on the part of the government at every level.

“What we’ve gotta understand is we live on an island, and islands are surrounded by water—surprise,

surprise,” said Bloomberg, according to the Nov. 9 *New York Daily News*. “Nobody anticipated something this big, and you can say, ‘Well, maybe they should have,’” he added. “You can’t build a wall up to the sky.”

An article in the *New York Times* the same day outlined preventive measures that would have limited damage. For example, none of the traffic tunnels in New York have gates, plugs or other basic barriers to block waters at their entrances, unlike similar tunnels around the world. The Brooklyn-Battery tunnel alone filled with nearly 100 million gallons of water.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the impact of the storm on electricity on Long Island was exacerbated because Long Island Power Authority had cut back on tree pruning near electric lines for years to reduce expenses.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo chastised those who ignored evacuation orders in face of no clear plan. At the same time, however, New York state officials decided not to order the evacuation of nursing homes in the Rockaways, one of the hardest hit areas in the city, even though it had done so last year during the less powerful Tropical Storm Irene. “Nursing homes complained bitterly about the cost of evacuations last year,” noted the *Times*.

Some 200 patients from Promenade Rehabilitation and Health Care Center in the Rockaways were not evacuated until a day after the storm flooded the building and the center lost power and ran out of food. The patients were then scattered in shelters and nursing homes across the region, often without records of their illness and medication. According to the *Times*, the center “lost” some of the patients and as of Nov. 9 had not told family members where they are.

The low-lying working-class areas of Staten Island were some of the worst hit in New York, with 23 of the 43 reported deaths in the city. Some 5,200 Staten Island residents have applied for temporary housing from FEMA. But by Nov. 9 the agency had found housing for only about two dozen, according to the *New York Post*.

The state is toying with the idea of putting some of the newly homeless in the recently shuttered Arthur Kill Correctional Facility, the *Post* reported.

“I lost everything, but I still have my pride. We don’t have to stay in a prison,” Wally Martinez, 44, told the *Post*. “My brother was once in that very prison and my mother used to visit him regularly. She used to tell me how miserable he looked and how filthy and disgust-

ing that prison was.”

‘Far Rockaway has been abandoned’

Militant correspondents visiting the Rockaways Nov. 11 found waterlogged contents of flooded homes still lining the streets.

“It’s a shame,” said Sharon Frost, 48. “Far Rockaway has been abandoned. We need to speak out.”

Many of those without electricity in the area have been told by the power company that they have to hire their own electrician to inspect and repair damage before the company will restore power, according to *Metro New York*.

It was similar in Oceanside, Long Island.

“There was no information. People felt like they were left in the dark,” Joann Piazza, 40, an unemployed chef, told the *Militant* Nov. 11, as she was cleaning up her mother’s Oceanside home. “That’s what made it even worse. At least they could have put out a flyer telling people where to go, what to do. I’m unemployed. They could have put me to work passing out flyers, keeping people informed.”

“I have flood insurance,” said Stephanie Cohen, 40, a hair stylist who lost almost the entire contents of her home. “But I have no idea what they are going to give us. It covers damage to the house, but not its content.”

Insurance companies are pressing to officially classify Sandy as a hurricane when it made landfall and not a tropical cyclone, because this would allow them to lower reimbursements.

According to neighborhood residents, there was no garbage collection on their streets in Oceanside for two weeks after the storm, and the electric company had not come by to inspect houses or let people know when power would be back on.

On Nov. 9 hundreds of Oceanside residents protested the slow response. Hempstead Town Supervisor Kate Murray and Democratic Rep. Carolyn McCarthy were booed and drowned out by chants “What do we want? Power! When do we want it? Now!”

A day after the rally, garbage trucks showed up and the Long Island Power Authority came by to inspect homes. “It’s the squeaky wheel that gets the oil,” said Cohen.

About 400 people rallied outside Long Island Power Authority headquarters in Hicksville Nov. 10 calling for the resignation of top officials.

Seth Galinsky and Lea Sherman contributed to this article.